Face Off: Bucharest

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Face Off: Bucharest

by DBMars

Summary

After framing Will for murder at the end of Season 1, Hannibal is adrift, not sure how to feel. He needs to kill, but can't do it close to home. So, he accepts the invitation to present at a psychiatry conference in Bucharest, Romania. One night, on the hunt for his latest victim, he meets a man who seems to have stolen his face...

Notes

This fic is a belated Valentine's Day Gift for Zilla @beanyzilla, one of my top most absolute favorite fan artists in the HEU fandom. When I got the prompt, I had JUST watched the Nigel parts of Charlie Countryman and was absolutely bonkers for Nigel, so I knew I had to do more than a twitfic. Please enjoy! Or, as Nigel would say, fucking enjoy it.

The Face is the Mirror of the Mind

Will Graham was in prison for Hannibal's crimes, waiting for trial. Despite everything going to plan – Hannibal's plan – Hannibal felt… adrift. Unsatisfied. Something was gnawing at him, and as in tune with himself as he usually was, the source of this feeling eluded him. He was restless. He wanted to kill and eat, wanted to unleash the Ripper. But now was certainly not the time. Will had been accusing him of being the Ripper with every breath he could muster, to any ears that would hear him.

He needed to kill, but it had to be, by necessity, far from home. He couldn't afford to create an extensive tableau in his usual style, but he could have a little treat, he thought. A snack. Something to tide him over until things settled. The restlessness was unbearable.

And so, Hannibal Lecter accepted the invitation to attend a psychology conference in Bucharest, Romania, and planned to stay an extra week. A well-deserved vacation, Alana said, after the heartbreak of Will's arrest. He'd readily agreed, not mentioning, of course, that he'd had Will imprisoned, awaiting multiple murder charges based on the evidence Hannibal had carefully planted at the house in Wolf Trap.

After the conference concluded, Hannibal began his holiday, dining out at the finest restaurants, visiting museums, and taking in multiple performances at the Roman Athenaeum. And at night, he hunted.

Tonight, he was dressed down from his usual suits and ties in a midnight blue shirt with a lighter-toned jacket in the same palette, and dark slacks. So attired, he stalked the streets of Bucharest's red-light district. The need to kill was becoming overwhelming. It was getting harder and harder to be careful and fastidious. He saw a group of well-dressed young people going into a club and trailed after them as if he was part of their group.

The club was suitably dark, dingy, full of loud music and inebriated patrons. It didn't take him long to select a target – a man in obnoxious designer clothes, chosen for the label and not their aesthetic, throwing money around left and right. He was small and greasy-looking, with a dark ponytail and horrendous facial hair. He was alone, and even those he enticed into his booth with free drinks eventually left, put off by his obnoxiousness. At last, the bouncers hauled him out of the booth after he groped a bottle service girl, and dragged him to the back of the club, presumably to toss him in the alley.

Hannibal slipped out of the club and around to the dirty alley, lingering next to a dumpster, waiting. Sure enough, the back door of the club opened, and the pony-tailed patron was dumped in the alley without any further ceremony. He got to his feet, shouting obscenities at the bouncers as they retreated.

As they went in, another man came out. Hannibal didn't get much of a look at him, this new man, perhaps another bouncer, wearing a shirt patterned with dachshunds that was whimsically opposite of the dangerous posture that coiled through his entire body. "I told you not to show your face around here again," the man in the dog shirt threatened as the pony-

tailed patron drunkenly got to his feet, examining the alley grease on his white fur coat. "What did I fucking say to you?"

"You said," the ponytail greaseball murmured through a dreamy smile, showing off his yellowed teeth. "You said you'd kill me if I came back."

"You got a good fucking memory." The taller man whipped up a bottle from a case near the back door of the bar and smashed it on the brick wall, providing himself with a glass shiv. Balling up his massive shoulders, he stalked toward the patron, who backed himself up against a wall, grinning despite the very real threat in front of him.

Hannibal marveled at this creature, the ropes of muscle of his forearms, the intimidating bulk of his shoulders and back that tapered down into a narrow waist. The waves of antipathy and wild violence that radiated from him were intoxicating in their own right. Hannibal sensed his unrestrained danger and was almost jealous – there was no person-suit for this man. He seemed utterly bare, his monstrousness exposed, worn proudly.

The tall man took the patron by the shoulder of his gaudy jacket and shoved him into the alley wall, ready to slice his throat with the glass. Hannibal's breath caught in his throat as he mentally stepped aside, offering his intended victim to this fellow monster, delirious to see what he would do and how he would do it.

A shot rang out in the alley. Hannibal crouched, then peered around the dumpster. The man in the dog shirt was on the ground, his shoulder torn open by a bullet. From the shadows at the other end of the alley came three more thugs in the characteristic dark clothes of hired muscle. The patron in the white coat was laughing maniacally, jumping up and down like an excited child as the bodyguards hauled the injured man to his feet and began beating him senseless, one holding his arms while the others pummeled him.

"I brought some friends with me, Nigel!" the pony-tailed patron giggled behind his ringed hand.

Despite his injuries, the man in the dog shirt – Nigel – reared back and kicked one of the bodyguards with such force that he flew backward and crashed into his boss, dropping them both to the ground. He turned and head-butted another of his attackers, trying desperately to wrench free from the one that was holding him.

The clouds uncovered the moon, suddenly washing the alley with cold light that added to the dim illumination of the street lamps.

Time slowed. Hannibal's breath caught in his throat.

This man – Nigel – looked almost *exactly* like him.

He was wearing Hannibal's face.

Yes, there were differences – a neck tattoo, longer hair tinged with gold, a scar or a freckle here and there. He was more obviously muscular and broader in the chest, and his

complexion was a shade darker. Small details, though, in the wake of his features being revealed. It was uncanny.

Hannibal moved before he even realized he'd made a conscious decision. He flew out from behind the dumpster, taking the man in the white coat by his ponytail and ramming his head into the wall. The closest bodyguard came at him with a bellow, but Hannibal was ready, saw his moves telegraphed from a mile away. He flicked open his folding knife and slashed it right across the man's beefy throat, painting the dingy wall with his blood. Meanwhile, Nigel got free and took down the attacker that had been holding him, bringing them both to the ground with a sick thump. Nigel rolled and picked up his broken bottle, burying it in his opponent's neck once, twice, three times, grinning down into his face as the blood spurted out, filling the air with its copper sweetness.

The final goon turned to run, but Hannibal was faster, stepping deftly over the body of his most recent victim and catching him around the neck and shoulders. Dropping his weapon, he elected to squeeze the man's neck in a choke-hold before adjusting his grip and snapping the bodyguard's neck.

Now the alley was filled with heavy breathing, punctuated by the piteous moans of the man Nigel had originally threatened, his white coat stained with blood from his split scalp.

Nigel got to his feet, his useless arm held protectively against his midsection. Hannibal's knife in his other hand.

Their eyes met.

A long moment of thick-breathing silence ensued.

"What the fuck is this?" Nigel murmured, staring at Hannibal with wary recognition. They were wearing one another's faces, after all.

"A rescue, I suppose," Hannibal said, withdrawing a handkerchief and sponging the blood from his face.

Nigel seemed to take a second to process this. Then his glittering gaze, just a little more tawny than Hannibal's maroon-brown eyes, shifted to the groaning man he'd come out into the alley to kill in the first place. "Rough night, huh?" he called flippantly. "Didn't go like you planned." He took a step and kicked the ponytailed man in the face, busting open his lips and nose. His victim yelped then dissolved into a fit of coughing on his own blood, curling into a ball on the filthy pavement. As Nigel righted himself, Hannibal saw him waver as if struggling to stay upright, his fist sign of weakness despite the bullet in his shoulder. He glanced Hannibal's way, raising an eyebrow.

"By all means," Hannibal offered. He bent down and snagged the hideous white fur coat and dragged the blubbering man to his feet. The victim struggled feebly, which ignited Hannibal's predatory instincts; it was all he could do not to lick the blood from the side of his face right now in front of the stranger.

Nigel brandished Hannibal's blade in his good hand, and rammed it into the victim's gut, drawing it upward. A fount of blood gushed forth. The victim sucked in his breath to scream, but Hannibal clamped a hand over his mouth. Together, the two men with the same face watched their victim expire. They left him in a twitching heap on the bloodstained concrete, next to the dumpster where the trash clearly belonged.

Nigel was shaking. Hannibal saw the strain evident in his features as he wiped the knife clean on his pant leg and folded it back down one-handed, giving it back to Hannibal. "Nice fucking knife," he complimented, sneering a smile. "Cuts real good." Then he stumbled, half-collapsing. Hannibal caught him, hauling him up by his good arm. "Fuck off," Nigel growled. "I'm fine."

In the distance, sirens wailed.

"Just put me back in the club," Nigel ordered, sagging against Hannibal, his voice commanding but his body giving up. "My people will…" He paused to vomit. A real gentleman, Hannibal thought wryly, aiming it away from Hannibal'a shoes.

"I'm sorry… Nigel, was it? No, you're coming with me," Hannibal said, shuffling the bigger man down the alley.

Nigel tried to pull away, but Hannibal twisted his hand and drove a finger into the bullet wound. Nigel bellowed, his knees collapsing. "Get your fucking hands off of me – do you know who the fuck I am?"

"No," Hannibal said. "But you have my face and I'd like to know why."

"I can't tell you shit if I bleed out," Nigel argued as Hannibal dragged him down the alley towards his rental car.

"I'm a doctor," Hannibal promised. "A former emergency room surgeon, even. You're in better hands with me than whoever's waiting for you in that filthy club."

He unlocked the car with the key fob and yanked open the back door, shoving Nigel inside. "It's in your best interest, Mr. Nigel," Hannibal said, "to avoid exerting yourself further."

Nigel grunted, trying to get up on his knees in the backseat of the car. Hannibal rifled through the bag he'd left in the front seat and found a syringe. Just as Nigel tried to back up out of the car, Hannibal took him by the belt and jabbed the needle into his thigh.

"That was a big fucking mistake…" Nigel snarled before he went limp in Hannibal's grasp.

God Has Given You One Face, and You Make Yourself Another

Chapter Summary

It's dangerous to corner a wounded animal...

The sirens were closer. Hannibal smoothed his hair and checked his side mirror to make sure there was no blood on his face. He quickly shrugged a black windbreaker and zipped it up, then stuffed Nigel's long legs into the backseat, shutting the door. He got behind the wheel and drove with modest care back to the small vacation home he'd rented through Airbnb. It was late; the neighborhood was quiet, the streets deserted.

Hannibal parked in the driveway and waited a few minutes to make sure no one was about; he got out and shouldered Nigel in a fireman's carry. He was heavier than he looked, his body a mass of unexpected muscled weight. Hannibal manhandled him into the house and into a bedroom. One-handed, he tore the shower curtain down from the ensuite bathroom and spread it over the bed, then unloaded the limp body.

Hannibal closed all the shades and curtains, then changed clothes, tossing what he'd been wearing in the washing machine and starting the cycle. His surgeon's instinct took over and he dutifully scrubbed in before stretching on a pair of medical gloves.

He readied his instruments on the bedside table. Nigel was still unconscious. In sleep, Hannibal was even more unsettled by the similarities in their faces. He did notice a scar beneath the man's chin that looked surgical in nature that he obviously didn't share. No time for questions now. Hannibal patched Nigel up, removing the slug from his shoulder and stitching him up, applying bandages. A simple disinfection and butterfly bandage for his split eyebrow. The rest of the bruises were superficial.

He hoped Nigel wasn't terribly attached to his dachshund shirt, as he'd been forced to cut it free and dispose of it.

Another difference between them. Nigel's chest was home to another long scar, possibly the result of a medical procedure, but poorly stitched and cared for. He also wore a silver ring through his left nipple.

Hannibal administered some antibiotics and pain medication, then made his patient comfortable, slipping off his shoes. He paused before removing the blood and alley-stained pants, assuming that Nigel would be the kind of man that might take offense to such a thing. But he quickly reasoned otherwise. First, it was unsanitary. Second, let Nigel wake up in a kind of destabilizing discomfort, knowing that someone had undressed him in his sleep. It might make him angry, but if he planned to try and escape or attack, it would give Hannibal

the edge. He peeled Nigel's jeans off and tossed them in the wash with his things after removing the cigarettes, lighter, and wallet from the pockets.

The man with his face was stripped now to his dark briefs, and Hannibal could more thoroughly examine the dragon tattoo that spread its wings over his thigh, wrapping its tail down to his ankle. This piece was much more beautifully done than the unfortunate pinup girl on Nigel's neck. As Hannibal shifted his patient to remove the plastic shower curtain from beneath him, he was granted a final tattoo reveal; Nigel had F-holes from a cello on the skin above his hips, as if his body were the instrument.

"And what a symphony you played tonight," Hannibal murmured, thinking of the tapestry of violence Nigel wove.

The last thing was a brief wipe-down with warm, soapy water, again to prevent infection and remove the last of the blood or any physical evidence of their crimes. A bath would be required later, but this would have to do for now.

It was then that Nigel's scent registered to him, as the warm cloth buffed his skin clean. It was musky and deeply masculine, smoky, conveying a savory richness. Much different, Hannibal thought, than Will's smell, which was so fever-sweet.

Best not to think of Will. It was bad enough that he was allowing himself to view his patient aesthetically, at least from the neck down. The face was disconcerting, but the body was, as all bodies were, a perfect reflection of the man; tight, coiled, beautiful, violent, unmistakably sensual.

Hannibal tucked his patient into bed, administered another dose of medicine, and left the room.

Shower. Sleep. Wake. Dress. Eat. It was early evening when Hannibal checked on his patient, who was still unconscious. He'd shifted a bit in his sleep. Hannibal took his vitals, which were strong – how could they be otherwise from such a man? – and went to the rental house's living room, sitting down at the bench of the gleaming black piano.

He played. Bach, Chopin, Debussy, his own compositions, weaving in and out of different pieces, stopping only to open a bottle of wine and enjoy a glass as he played. When he considered a refill and turned to climb off of the bench, his eye fell on the silhouette of a hulking form lingering in the hallway that led to the bedrooms. His patient – Nigel – was using the door frame to stay upright. His posture said violence, but his eyes were soft, entranced.

So, the beast was calmed by music.

Hannibal picked up his wine glass and stepped away from the piano. "Good evening, Mr. Nigel. It's good to see you awake. I must insist you return to bed, however."

Nigel sneered, though he looked pale and drawn. "Yeah, you can fucking forget that. I'm leaving."

Hannibal moved between him and the front door, though he kept his posture nonthreatening. “You were shot last night. I removed the bullet and closed the wound. This is a safe place for you to rest. Before you object, consider that if I wanted you dead I would have killed you by now. Also, you’re not wearing any clothes.”

“Dead isn’t the worst thing,” Nigel growled, apparently totally unconcerned about being in his underwear. “I can’t be here. The kind of people I work for don’t just let you take a fucking sick day.”

“I can’t let you leave in good conscience,” Hannibal explained. “You are my patient. To release you now would violate my oath to do no harm.”

Nigel laughed aloud this time. “Why don’t you tell Mikhail and his guys about your fucking oath?”

“Was that his name?” Hannibal stepped closer. “The man we killed?”

“Yeah, and I need to tell my boss what happened. He’s gonna think I’m sitting in a fucking interrogation room spilling my guts to the fucking cops.”

Hannibal cocked his head. “You fell into a trap, Mr. Nigel. This Mikhail had backup you weren’t expecting. Who set this trap, do you think? Your boss, perhaps? Or someone else who knew you would be in that alley alone?”

This shut Nigel up, and his playful-deadly sneer became a cold expression of uncompromising murder. Hannibal could tell he was considering the implications. Then he reached out and picked up a decorative vase, holding it by the stem and smashing the base off to give himself a weapon. “Get the fuck out of my way,” he said.

“Not until you tell me why you’re wearing my face,” Hannibal said in his best therapist voice.

“I don’t have time for this shit. Move.” He brandished the broken vase.

“You seem to prefer found weapons like this,” Hannibal noted calmly, coming even closer. “I assume you enjoy the intimidation factor of smashing the glass to provide you with the deadly bits, even if glass is less than ideal for stabbing or slicing.”

Again, in his observational therapist's voice. Nigel blinked, glancing down at the broken vase in his hand. Then he shrugged and rammed it towards Hannibal’s throat.

He was tired and hurt, and it made him slow. Hannibal countered, trapping his wrist between his arm and his body and slamming it into the hard part of his knee, making Nigel drop the rest of the glass, shattering it.

Slow, but still strong. Nigel got free and lashed out with his good hand, getting a shot against Hannibal’s cheekbone that made him see white. And suddenly they were tangled together, fighting, thudding to the floor near the front door. Still *very* strong. Hannibal would have felt a trickle of mortal fear, a reflexive reaction instead of an intellectual one, if he wasn’t so sure

he could exploit Nigel's injuries to save his own life if need be. For now, he let Nigel grapple him, expending energy, making him believe he was winning, despite the sweat running down Nigel's face and the bloom of new blood on his bandages.

Nigel squirmed on top of him and held him down with his own body weight, hands locked around Hannibal's wrists, grinding them down into the floor. He paused, though Hannibal had already tensed, waiting for the next punch to the face or head-butt to the teeth. The house was silent, save their harmonized panting. Hannibal had his breathing sorted in half a moment, but Nigel was still laboring, probably due to his injuries and the drugs still in his system.

No.

It was something else.

Hannibal could smell it now, pouring out of his pores like steam from a pipe. He cocked his head, inhaling, pale brows rising slightly. That was the smell of a man's sexual arousal, no doubt about it.

His suspicions were confirmed when Nigel adjusted his position, pressing the bulge of his hard cock against Hannibal's groin.

Fascinating. An interesting turn of events, to say the least.

Nigel's grip on his arms slackened just slightly, the tension in his veiny hands lessening. Whether this was on purpose or because he was tiring was uncertain. Hannibal saw the opportunity to gain the upper hand at that moment, but decided instead to see what would happen next. He was *very* curious. Delighted, even. It had been decades since he'd been with another man. Just like with Will, he thoroughly enjoyed this gangster's unpredictability. It was arousing, not knowing at all what to expect when so many other humans were so dully ingrained in psychological routine.

Nigel grunted and deliberately moved his pelvis, thrusting against Hannibal, whose body was responding in kind, an instinct he allowed himself to embrace. Again. Now Hannibal felt a bolt of unbearable desire shoot up his spine, pooling in his gut. So strange to see his own face hovering over his. It reminded him of the first time he ate live octopus – something that instinctively should have dismayed him but instead proved to be an unforgettable experience and a delectable delicacy.

Hannibal exhaled a deep sigh, breath catching at the end as he thrust back, grinding into Nigel.

And then, the killer with his face lost himself to a kind of madness. He let go of Hannibal's arms to snag a hand in his hair, the other pulling at his clothing, kissing him, stroking his body, rutting against him. He tasted like murder and smoke and Hannibal let his guard down, raking his hands over Nigel's bare back, groping his ass, a keening little sound escaping his lips as Nigel tongued his neck.

“You’re him, aren’t you?” Nigel demanded, rutting against Hannibal again, then shoving a hand between them to cup his swollen cock through his trousers. “It’s you. *Il Mostro di Firenze* …!”

Well, there was a name Hannibal hadn’t heard in a very long time. “Yes,” he breathed with a tiny nod.

Nigel’s rough hands tore at Hannibal’s clothes, as if he hadn’t been shot in the shoulder less than 24 hours previously or had just threatened to kill him. His touch was hot and frenetic, peeling off all of Hannibal’s layers to find the monster beneath, wild to get to the heated flesh. He flung Hannibal’s trousers off and tore his shirt open and that was enough, pausing again only to pull himself out of his briefs. They wrestled together now, not in an attempt to kill one another, but in an amorous play. Hannibal was overcome by the salty taste of Nigel’s skin, his strength, the little sharp pains as he bit along Hannibal’s throat and the ridge of his collarbone, pulling his chest hair. Hannibal answered in kind by sliding the nipple ring into his mouth and giving it a sharp tug that elicited quite the moan as a response.

A moan and a smile. It was more of a sneer, the self-satisfied, pleasured smile of a man drunk on himself.

The intensity ticked up a few notches and they became frenzied. Hannibal caught Nigel’s cock between his legs and rutted his own against the remarkably soft skin of Nigel’s belly. Nigel’s stubble was delightfully rough against Hannibal’s smooth cheek. A quilt of sensations stitched together in one person. Remarkable boy.

Nigel spent with a hedonistic groan, and the wantonness of it, of seeing his own face at the moment of climax, ensured Hannibal wasn’t far behind. It left him trembling. They collapsed as if at the end of a battle, Hannibal half-resting on Nigel’s good shoulder, an arm bent and draped on his chest.

A Man's Face is His Autobiography

Chapter Summary

The origin of Nigel's face is revealed..

After a long time, Hannibal sat up and arched over Nigel, who remained on the floor after sliding his good arm behind his head with a self-satisfied smirk. Hannibal bent in and kissed him again, an exploratory act. The gesture was accepted, strange as it was to receive affection from one's own features.

"Would you classify that as masturbation, or incest?" Hannibal asked him.

Nigel scoffed. "The fuck is that supposed to mean?"

"Why are you wearing my face?" Hannibal asked again.

Nigel was smart, Hannibal found, more clever than he'd initially thought. "I'm bleeding," he deflected. "And I need a fucking cigarette."

"Stay here," Hannibal suggested. "Or are you still convinced you need to leave?"

"I'm not going anywhere until I fucking smoke," Nigel told him.

Hannibal got up and finished taking off his ruined shirt, dropping it on the pile of clothing he'd been wearing, then went into the bathroom. He thought it was possible Nigel might flee now, while he was distracted, but it didn't happen. After he'd filled up the triangle-shaped bathtub with warm water and returned, Nigel was just where he'd left him, cock hanging out, head resting on his arm, playing with the pearly drops Hannibal had left on his belly.

Hannibal offered him a hand, and Nigel took it, letting Hannibal hoist him by his good arm. They hobbled to the bathroom where Hannibal directed Nigel into the tub, sitting so his injured shoulder was closest to the edge where it could be tended. He turned on the shower for himself, but before he could get in, Nigel said, "I told you I need a smoke, gorgeous."

"A reflective compliment," Hannibal noted, retrieving the man's cigarettes and lighter, and a coffee mug for an ashtray. The Airbnb was no smoking, of course, but he would pay for the cleaning bill. "Plays to your ego as well."

Nigel relaxed in the bath and lit a cigarette, the smoke rising to the ceiling and mingling with the steam of the shower.

Hannibal cleaned up, dressed once more, and returned to find that again, Nigel hadn't moved. "Bring me a drink, sweetheart." When Hannibal gave him a cup of water, he said, "Don't you

have any vodka or a beer or something?"

Hannibal's mouth curled up at the edge. "I have a 2012 Châteauneuf-du-Pape ."

Nigel grunted and took the water while Hannibal knelt next to the bathtub and fixed a popped stitch, disinfected the gunshot wound, and covered it with bandages again. "Now," he said, pulling over a stool and settling in. "I'd like you to tell me what I want to know."

Nigel took a drag and let it out through his nostrils. He was looking at the smoke curling up from his cigarette, not at Hannibal, body languid in the still water of the bath. "I was seventeen when I started working for a man with connections to organized crime. I was the best fucking hit man in Romania." He took a drag and tapped ash. "When I was 20 I got sent to Italy to do a job. The fucking *polizia* had a witness and some photos of me. Before I went home, my boss sent me to a man to get a new face." Another drag, tap. He scratched his eyebrow and bumped his thumb against the bandaged bit, wincing. "He asked me what I wanted to look like. He had a newspaper on his table and there was this article. With a picture."

"' *Local student's flat raided in connection to Il Mostro slayings'* ," Hannibal recited the headline from memory. Extraordinary.

Nigel took a drag, nodded. Out with his smoke came, "I said that's who I want to fucking look like. That's who I want to be. He said that was fucking stupid – why trade one murderer's face for another's?" Nigel shrugged. "They didn't know Il Mostro in Romania, and you weren't ever formally charged with anything, were you?"

"I wasn't," Hannibal confirmed.

Nigel sat up in the bath, the water swirling around his waist, and leaned closer. "That thing you did with the painting. That was fucking incredible, fuck." He sighed. "I knew you understood," he said, "that it's *beautiful* ."

Hannibal kissed him now, without meaning to, very suddenly destabilized by the intimate warmth of being *seen* . And appreciated.

He realized, in truth, that was all he really wanted from Will Graham. That was the endgame.

He leaned back, tasting Nigel on his lips. "Your decision feels less like a form of theft and more like an honor."

Nigel scoffed. "I don't know what the fuck all of this means. I try not to think too hard about God and fate and all that shit."

"I tend to think too hard about it," Hannibal told him. His hand crept out and smoothed back Nigel's hair, different in texture from his own, almost softer.

Nigel dropped his cigarette in the mug and closed his eyes, relaxing his head back on the edge of the tub, the monster soothed by a gentle touch. "I don't think you're gonna try and

kill me," he said. "Though if I was gonna go out, getting hit by Il Mostro would be pretty fucking poetic."

Hannibal recoiled inwardly at the thought of doing Nigel any more harm. Not when he'd become so interesting. Not when he made Hannibal feel seen. "I'm not going to hurt you. And I think you should stay here for a while until you've worked out what you need to do regarding the trap you stumbled into. No one knows you're here. You're safe."

Nigel nodded, his tongue touching his bottom lip.

"Are you hungry?"

"Fucking starving."

Hannibal rose and set out a towel and a bathrobe. "Stay as long as you like. Don't get the bandages wet. I'll make something."

Before he left, Nigel said, "Was it good for you, gorgeous?"

Hannibal paused at the door frame, an unconscious little smile teasing his lips. "Yes, it was," he said.

This seemed to satisfy Nigel. He lit another cigarette, and Hannibal went to the kitchen.

A Man Who Dares to Look the Devil in the Face

Chapter Summary

"Who played the cello for you, Nigel?"

Hannibal extended his time in the vacation home and let Jack Crawford and his patients know that he had unexpectedly come across a long-lost family member and would be remaining in Romania for a few more weeks. Those weeks passed, and Nigel's body healed, fueled by the "best fucking food" he ever ate and Hannibal's bedside manner.

Nigel often lay on the sofa, smoking, eyes unfocused and his mind elsewhere, caught in the sublime. His body, Hannibal realized, seemed to feed on music, and his recovery was aided by hours of piano playing. He had no formal education to speak of, but his musical instinct was sharply tuned, and he developed tastes and preferences as the weeks wore on, asking for specific things. "Y'know, the one that goes do-do-do-do de-da-do…" singing Debussy's *Arabesque* .

Above all, he preferred Hannibal's compositions.

"What was that one about?" Nigel asked one day as Hannibal slowly lowered the key cover.

"A man I know," Hannibal answered, joining him on the sofa. Nigel stretched out his legs and rested them on Hannibal's lap. Hannibal knew the cue and rubbed his large feet.

"Huh." Smoke from his nostrils. "And what fucking man would that be?" Hannibal was suddenly hot all over with the searing burn of Nigel's obvious jealousy, as if they had any claim over one another.

"His name is Will."

Nigel grunted. "You love him?"

Hannibal sighed, working his thumb along the arch of Nigel's foot. "I want him to reach his full potential. I want him to find himself. Yes, I think that's love. But I don't think he loves me."

"Not yet," Nigel growled possessively. "He sounds like somebody who doesn't know a good fucking thing when he sees it. Sounds like a dumb *bitch* ."

Hannibal's mouth climbed into a benevolent smile as he massaged up Nigel's leg, pushing up his jeans to reach his defined calves. "Will and I are just alike. Once he learns to love himself, he may have the potential to see me. The way you see me."

“And the way *you* see *me* .” Nigel stubbed out his cigarette and hauled Hannibal into his arms, reclining on the couch so they were chest to chest. He stroked Hannibal’s hair with a gentleness one wouldn’t expect from his violence-ready hands, kissed him with the same unexpected tenderness. “Just a couple of fucking monsters.”

“Teratophilia?”

Nigel sighed, shifting Hannibal under him. “Why do you use such big fucking words all the time?” he sighed into Hannibal’s neck, groping him now with much less gentle grace. “I would have beaten the shit out of you if we were at school together.”

“A bully. How ordinary.”

Nigel pulled his hair now, forcing Hannibal’s chin up. “Nothing’s ordinary about me, gorgeous. Same way nothing’s ordinary about you.” The kiss was rough and delicious, mirrored lips.

Nigel let him go to yank his tee-shirt off over his head, grinning as Hannibal caressed his abdomen and hips, gripping his back, tracing the braille of his spine. “Tell me about the cello,” he requested, even as Nigel unbuttoned his shirt and tasted his nipples, one, then the other, making him gasp by edging at them with his teeth.

“Not now.”

Hannibal traced his fingers along where he thought the tattoos were, the F-holes. “You’re not a musician. Yet you are sustained and fed by music. Who played the cello for you, Nigel?”

Nigel caught him by the throat. “I said not now.”

“Someone you love. Someone you credit with making you who you are, and you felt the need to commemorate that on your body.”

“Are you doing your fucking shrink shit on me?” The hand tightened. Hannibal’s pulse throbbed in his temples, but he only smiled.

“Tell me about him.”

“ *Her* ,” Nigel corrected hotly, then seemed to realize he’d fallen into yet another trap. He got up from the couch, hauling Hannibal with him by the arm and the shirt, then pushed him toward the hallway. He was certainly feeling better, Hannibal noted – a good portion of his wired strength seemed to have returned.

Undeterred, he spoke as Nigel twisted his arm behind his back and took a grip on the back of his hair, shoving him through the bedroom door. “Who was she? A treasured sister? I might know something about that. Though I think–” He had to stop his sentence temporarily when Nigel tossed him on the bed and pressed him down by the back of his neck. “-a lover,” he finished, letting Nigel yank his trousers down, listening to the musical chime of his belt buckle.

“Don’t fucking move,” Nigel threatened him as he groped around the bedside table on his side, which was littered with pill bottles, empty cigarette cartons, and condom wrappers. Finding one that hadn’t been used, he tore it open and rolled it on as Hannibal patiently waited for both the truth and to be fucked. He didn’t have to wait long for either. Nigel squirted a cursory amount of cold lube onto his crack and fingered him for less than a minute before ramming inside, reaching around to stroke Hannibal’s cock with slick fingers.

“Six years ago… I got carved up… in a knife fight,” he said, hands cupping Hannibal’s hips now before delivering a hard slap to his ass. “Got fixed up… and hid in an apartment…”

“Much like your situation now, I should think,” Hannibal said. He managed to get the entire sentence out before the gasped pleasure as Nigel slapped his ass again and leaned forward once more to stroke him. “And once again… ughn… music supported your recovery.”

“Saved my… fucking life!” Nigel corrected him, really pounding into him now. “My wife… Gabi…”

“Your *wife* ?”

This made Nigel flip Hannibal onto his back, opening his legs to press in again, pumping Hannibal’s cock in time. “Yeah, my fucking wife. You think I go around sucking just any guy’s fucking dick? I’m not a faggot.”

“Now is a very interesting time to make such a declaration,” Hannibal noted, playing with Nigel’s nipple ring.

Nigel laughed through his panting breaths. “Balls deep in your ass? Yeah… just how you like it…”

“The *irony* .” Hannibal tensed and came, Nigel absorbing his moans with rough kisses before he went back to his vigorous thrusting. “Isn’t Gabi wondering where you are?”

“We’re separated. For now.”

Hannibal tugged the nipple ring and Nigel came, hard, filling him with spurts of warmth before collapsing on top of him, coming to rest on his chest. “Isn’t Will wondering where *you* are?” he murmured, his words stirring the hair on Hannibal’s pectoral.

Hannibal brushed Nigel’s blonde strands behind his ear. “Yes, he likely is,” Hannibal admitted. “But he doesn’t want to see me at the moment, either. We’re separated, too, I suppose.”

Nigel rolled off of him, getting up to strip off and flush the condom and light a cigarette. He lay back down next to Hannibal, who was turned on his side, watching him. “I love her,” Nigel said. “This…” he motioned between the two of them, “doesn’t… change that. This is different. I’m not gonna say to you, stop being in love with that little bitch you’re obsessed with.”

Hannibal nodded, a slight movement. “We’ve no choice then, either of us,” he said at last, propping himself up on his elbow to look down at Nigel. “We’ll have to win them back, won’t we?”

Nigel arched his neck up and kissed him softly on the lower lip. “Yeah. Don’t see how we have much of a fucking choice.”

The moment was long and melancholy.

Finally, Nigel turned to tap ash in the nearby coffee cup. “Go make me some dinner, gorgeous,” he requested, back to his cocky self. When Hannibal got out of bed with a little grimace, a small hitch in his gait, Nigel grinned and slapped him on the ass one more time. “One to grow on,” he said.

The next morning, when Hannibal woke up, Nigel was gone. In his place was a burner phone. There was only one number programmed in.

Hannibal opened it and saw there was a text message waiting.

You’ll always be my favorite monster.

Hannibal closed the phone. He lay in silence for a long time before using his other cell to call the airport and arrange his flight back to Baltimore.

Turn Your Face to the Sun and the Shadows Fall Behind You

Chapter Summary

A fix-it.

Six Months Later

Hannibal put one leg into his plastic suit, adjusting it as he went, then the other. Standing carefully, he drew the suit up, then slid his arms into it, making sure to hold his cuffs so his dress shirt wouldn't bunch up. He fixed the collar, and then zipped it up, humming a little Debussy to himself.

Opening up the rusted metal door to the main part of the abandoned warehouse, he hit a switch on the wall, bathing the concrete and metal shadows with bright, industrial light.

Two people were strapped to metal tables in the center of the space. Nearby was a stainless steel table full of tools; scalpels, bone saws, a chest spreader, syringes full of drugs, knives, knives, knives.

The victims strapped to the tables were gagged, but that didn't stop them from trying to scream, struggling against their bindings. Hannibal stepped over to where they could see him in the pool of harsh light. The fear in their eyes was intoxicating.

"Good evening, Mr. Countryman. Ms. Ibanescu. I'm here on Nigel's behalf."

The pigs renewed their struggles and muffled screams, as if God would save them from the abattoir. Hannibal went over to the digital camcorder on the nearby tripod and switched it on. "For Nigel," he explained. "I apologize for filming without your consent, but he's going to want to see this when he comes out of surgery. Now, where to begin? I think with Mr. Countryman. I have a more complicated idea for you, Ms. Ibanescu. I was inspired by a killer in Baltimore who crafted a cello out of a human being…"

The End

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